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ABSTRACT

The set of behavicrs and procedures used in working with school counselors participating in the Upward Bound and Talent Search programs at the University of Maine at Orono is described. Areas of concern designed to facilitate the relationship between school counselors and program coordinators include the following: (1) basic program information, (2) identification of potential clients, (3) selection of services, (4) development of presentations for "back-home use", (5) administrative and faculty support, (6) paperwork, (7) professionalism, (8) first-hand experience in the actual programs, and (9) teamwork. (Author/HLM)

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Upward Bound and Talent Search Work With School Counselors

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Upward Bound and Talent Search Work With School Counselors

During the year 1978-1979, the U.S. Office of Education funded more than 500 special programs designed to assist disadvantaged youth in urban and rural areas throughout the nation to complete secondary education and to enroll in postsecondary education (U.S. Office of Education, 1978). Since then, increases in appropriations have provided for increases in the numbers of funded projects. Upward Bound and Talent Search, authorized under the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended, reach thousands of young people from poverty backgrounds who cannot make it with the amount of support which can be provided in the average school situation. The two special programs serve young people who need help, individual encouragement, and preparation beyond what the school counselor responsible for serving 300, 400, or 500 students can possibly provide.

The changes that an Upward Bound or a Talent Search project can effect in the lives of disadvantaged youth seem, to those who have witnessed them, to be nothing short of miraculous. Through participation in one of these projects, a young person from a background of extreme poverty and deprivation can become able to compete successfully in the educational system, with all that is implied for the young person's future and for our nation's future.

Since Upward Bound and Talent Search are likely to do part of their work on an outreach basis--recruiting disadvantaged youth with academic potential--they rely heavily on the assistance of school counselors. In spite of chronic absenteeism problems, perhaps the greatest number of eligible youth are found in the schools--at least part of the time. And the positive assistance and willing cooperation of many school counselors across the country have had a major impact on the successes of Upward Bound and Talent Search in their work.

with poverty youth.

However, one of the most difficult problems these two projects face is a lack of cooperation on the part of some school counselors. Some counselors, in effect, close the doors of the school to project staff. The school counselor has tremendous power over us in this situation; he or she has the power to decide whether or not any of the disadvantaged students in a school will receive the extra help and encouragement provided by an Upward Bound or a Talent Search program. As things stand now, there is little the project staff can do if a counselor refuses to cooperate or gives reluctant and minimal support.

It is true, of course, that a single school counselor who refuses to cooperate cannot make or break an Upward Bound or a Talent Search program. Most projects work with several schools and several counselors, and the number of projects funded does not begin to meet the total need. If a counselor should refuse to cooperate or consistently drags his or her feet, the program will concentrate its energies on helping disadvantaged students in other schools where the counselors are cooperative. Project staff may seek to reach the uncooperative counselor's students in other ways which are often difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. However, it is obvious that the real loss is not to the Upward Bound or Talent Search project, but to the disadvantaged students in a school who will never have the choice of participating in one of these programs.

To increase the chances that a school counselor will choose to assist us and to decrease the chances of having the school doors closed in our faces, the Upward Bound and Talent Search programs at the University of Maine at Orono, through several years of experience working on an outreach basis with 100 counselors in 70 schools throughout the State of Maine, have developed a set of procedures and behaviors to use in working with school counselors. This article presents a description of these procedures.

Providing information about Upward Bound and Talent Search program services. The Upward Bound and Talent Search program staffs take the responsibility for communicating to school counselors what the programs are all about and of conveying at the same time an image of seriousness, professionalism, and sound organization. One of the ways in which this is done is in the making of initial contacts with a school counselor. The Talent Search counselor, for example, calls a school counselor to introduce him- or herself and request a meeting to discuss the program. This call is followed up immediately by a neatly typed, businesslike letter confirming the meeting time and date. The letter also contains a brief description of the project's services and target population, and a copy of the program's brochure is enclosed.

At the first meeting, the Talent Search counselor describes the range of services offered and the detailed criteria for client eligibility, and makes a request of the school counselor for assistance in the recruitment of clients. We also ask the school counselor in what ways the school might wish to use the program's assistance. This visit is followed up by a letter thanking the school counselor and confirming the arrangements that have been made. In setting up a schedule for future visits, we make an effort to establish a regular plan of visits so that all involved will be able to depend on the outreach project's visit to the school.

Methods for identifying potential clients. Since many school counselors ask for suggestions about how to identify disadvantaged students within a school without embarrassing, humiliating, or labelling them, the Upward Bound staff has compiled a list of the strategies school counselors have used in finding such students. The list includes identifying the names of students on the free lunch list; students in the general and vocational classes; students referred by social workers; students who live in low-income housing or poverty neighbor-

hoods; students from racial or cultural minorities; students from single-parent families, especially if headed by women; students who have recently dropped out; recent graduates who did not continue their education; and suggestions from students who already are enrolled in Upward Bound and Talent Search.

Selection of needed services. We encourage school counselors to select one or more services from the range of services that can be offered by these programs for disadvantaged youth, so as not to feel that they must take all or nothing. They may select services based upon what they think is most needed in their school by low-income students at a particular time and which they know they are not able to offer. Thus, one school requests that Talent Search put on financial aid workshops. Another school wants Talent Search to assist low-income parents in completing the parent section of the student financial aid application form. Other schools refer large numbers of low-income seniors for postsecondary motivational counseling. Other schools, in which there is a chronic condition of apathy and despair, request educational motivational programs for their students.

Arranging for Upward Bound or Talent Search presentations within a school. We request that school counselors make arrangements for the Talent Search and Upward Bound staffs to make direct presentations to whole classes so that students can refer themselves to the program, thereby reducing the need for the school counselor to make referrals. In addition to generating self-referrals, many students who hear such presentations and who might not be eligible or interested in enrolling in the programs, become more motivated to pursue further education and more aware of and willing to use school guidance services. Sometimes schools request written outlines of such presentations prior to approving them, and we are glad to provide such outlines.

We also make presentations at faculty meetings to facilitate teacher referrals.

Gaining administrative support. In some schools, the school counselor is free to make decisions about cooperation with Talent Search or Upward Bound. In others, decisions must be made at a higher level. As you drive up to a school it is impossible to tell from the outside what the internal pecking order is. So to spare ourselves and the school counselor any embarrassment or difficulties later on, we take the conservative track and approach the superintendent and the principal before seeking the support of the school counselor.

Paperwork. This is, unfortunately, one of the banes of modern institutional existence. We work constantly to try to keep the amount of paperwork needed from the school counselor to a minimum and to streamline that which is required. However, we do explain paperwork in terms of federal requirements and try to make sure counselors understand that a federally funded program's continued existence may depend upon the adequacy of its documentation system.

Confirming appointments. As we know that school counselors are busy, and also that last-minute changes in school schedules can necessitate the cancellation of our planned visit, we take the responsibility of calling a day in advance to confirm an appointment.

Understanding the culture of an individual school. We have learned, often the hard way, that each school system is unique. We ask school counselors to tell us about the particular concerns and circumstances of a school. In one it is critical to follow the chain of command; in another, there is a dress code; recent changes in personnel have affected another; community pressure over a particular issue is having a marked impact on another. When we are made aware of these things, we can be more sensitive in working with both staff and students.

Keeping each other informed. The Upward Bound and Talent Search program

staffs have learned that we are most effective in our work with disadvantaged students when we keep school counselors well informed about what we are doing with and for a student. School counselors who are on the scene will provide some extra encouragement and support to a student at a critical time. Likewise, when a school counselor keeps us informed about a student, we can come in at a crucial time to provide needed support and guidance. We communicate in a variety of ways, depending on the arrangements worked out with a particular school, ranging from formal paper reports to informal conversations. We have developed appropriate parent authorization forms permitting this exchange of information.

Taking a school's recommendations seriously. It is unlikely that we would take a client into one of these programs against a school counselor's recommendation. Teamwork in follow-up is often crucial for a student's progress, and such teamwork is made virtually impossible if a counselor is opposed to a student's enrollment in the program.

Communicating the big picture. As we all live in fragments of a larger total, at least once a year the Upward Bound and Talent Search projects prepare and send out to all cooperating personnel throughout the state a final report on the projects' activities and accomplishments. The most effective and the best received have been our one-page summaries. These reports, accompanied by a cover letter of appreciation for assistance given, communicate to school counselors and others the significance of their cooperation with the projects.

Providing mutual support. We find that trust can be built up in other ways. In addition to expressing appreciation directly on a day-to-day basis, in the spring of each year we send a letter to the school counselors' supervisors, expressing our appreciation for the counselors' assistance during the year.

School counselors have written some eloquent and moving letters to our supervisors praising our work with students as well.

Experiential and informal involvement. We have worked with school counselors to develop ways for them to experience our projects first-hand. Some have worked as full-time staff members in the summer on-campus Upward Bound program. Others have enrolled in the Upward Bound recertification workshops that we have presented. Many have attended on-campus short workshops where they have mixed with project students from other high schools, project graduates, and project staff. Others have visited informally to observe and talk when they have had occasion to be on campus. Some have been involved in the programs as practicum students in the University of Maine at Orono Counselor Education program. The Upward Bound and Talent Search staffs, in turn, participate in the school counselors' local and state professional associations where they have the opportunity to meet informally with the counselors, get to know them in a more comfortable setting, and support their organization.

Professionalism. We find that disadvantaged students often feel persecuted and abused by a school and its personnel. This negative attitude toward institutions has been described as one of the characteristics of poverty people (Haggstrom 1966). The Upward Bound and Talent Search staffs, as professional colleagues of school counselors, support schools and counselors to students, and in this way, model for them more positive attitudes.

The assumption upon which we at the University of Maine at Orono base our work with the disadvantaged is that they need to learn to behave as good school citizens in order to succeed within the educational system. We have developed methods of teaching such improved behaviors. So we find that when students we have worked with return to school and behave more responsibly and are more motivated to achieve, as well as equipped with some of the academic skills

they need, our credibility among school teachers and counselors increases.

Conclusion

Our work with school counselors in the State of Maine has facilitated the enrollment of hundreds of youth in postsecondary education who would not otherwise have attended. A major foundation for this acccomplishment has been the quality of the relationships we have had with school counselors. Having these relationships has not been a matter of luck or personality, but has involved hard work and commitment on both sides. The most successful relationships involve effective communication, mutual support, understanding of each other's point of view, and the sharing of responsibilities. It has often seemed like a long, hard struggle, but the payoffs have been great as we have seen young people from poverty backgrounds helped to make the long journey from hovel to college campus.

As for those counselors who will not participate, we try to understand the threat they might see in us, their fears that we might succeed where they will not, the feelings of territoriality--and perhaps for some, the difficulty they have in dealing at all with the disadvantaged and unmotivated young person. We will continue to try to gain their interest, their trust and their cooperation.

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